

The Haunted House at Hindhead

By Jessie Middleton

Having heard that Miss Marjorie Patterson, the clever young actress and novelist, had had some ghostly experiences, I asked her to give me an account of them. She kindly consented, and this is the story she told me:

“It happened last summer and the year before, when I was staying down at Hindhead. The house was near the Punchbowl, and it was not an old one, as is the case in most stories of haunted houses.

“The second night I slept there I awoke at eight in the morning, and the first thing my eyes rested on was the figure of an old lady sitting quietly by the side of my bed, looking at me.

“I must tell you that I am not one of those people who awake slowly and spend some time in coming gradually back from the land of dreams. On the contrary, the moment I wake up I am quite awake.

“On seeing the old lady there, my first feeling was one of annoyance. There were several old ladies in the house, and I thought it great presumption of this one to invade my room. I was most indignant and sat up in bed to ask her what she was doing there. She was dressed in black, and had on a mob cap which completely hid every vestige of her hair. She was very pale, with hollow cheeks, her nose was short and broad, and her teeth prominent. As I opened my mouth to speak, horrible to relate, her features slowly melted into the form of a hideous skull, and she vanished.

“I was very frightened. It was eight o’clock on a summer’s morning, and therefore quite light, but all the same I could not shake off the feeling of horror and fear. When the maid came in with my hot water, I told her what I had seen and questioned her closely, and she confessed that there *was* something queer about the room, and that a gentleman, who had occupied it not long before, had had to leave it suddenly.

“I knew that what I had seen was not the continuation of a dream, because, as I have said, I wake up thoroughly at once, and do not doze on drowsily as some people do.

“In spite of my shock I determined to stay on in the room, as I was decidedly interested. The next night I went to sleep, but in the middle of the night I was awakened by the sound of two people whispering near my bed. The voices were those of old people. Then something came along and stood quite close to me, still whispering, and I distinctly heard it rubbing its hands together and cracking its joints. The sounds I heard could not have been anybody in the next room, because the walls were solid and I could not hear any sound at any time in that room. There was no wind, and besides—I *felt* the awful thing near me.

“I continued to sleep in the room, wondering what would happen next, and I heard the thing, whatever it was, frequently. Often I would wake and say to myself, ‘It’s on this side—it’s on that side.’ One night I called my mother, and, though she saw nothing, she felt it too. “After its first appearance to me it didn’t materialise any more, but it never left me alone, and I got exasperated and used to speak aloud to it, and say, ‘Do for goodness’ sake get out and let me go to sleep.’

“One night I had been down to the bathroom to have a bath, and it was rather late—about twelve o’clock—when I came upstairs with my sponge and towels in my hand. As I entered my room and switched on the light, I felt the usual sensation that *It* was there. In front of the fireplace stood an old wicker chair with its back to the door. I heard the chair creak loudly, and as I looked at it I saw the two arms open out slowly, as if some old person were getting up out of it most laboriously, and the chair moved back and quivered, and rocked over on its back legs.

“The whole of that house, not only my room, was haunted, particularly in the month of September. Vague grey shadows, sometimes running low on the ground like animals, would be seen by people on the stairs. There were very strange influences and uncanny sounds there. Sometimes for days together I heard nothing, and then a queer feeling would come over me, a physical feeling, as if a cold breath passed over my head and ruffled my hair, and I would say, ‘It’s back here.’

“They say these Elementals are very teasing and mischievous. I accounted for them by the fact that the neighbourhood had in olden times been the scene of murder and other dark deeds done by highwaymen, and we were not far from the spot where the gibbet once stood and the bodies of the murderers used to hang in chains. I have been told by psychic people that if you speak to Elementals you ought to wish them happiness.

“One of the last nights I slept in the haunted room I had another experience. It was in the evening, and my mother was with me, and we were talking. Suddenly the electric light was turned off—the knob moved, and we both distinctly heard it click. Then it clicked again, and the light went up. I cried out: ‘Mother, *It’s* in the room!’

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“That was the end of my Hindhead experiences, but it might interest you to hear of something that happened when I was a child of eight. I was too young at the time to remember it distinctly now, but my mother, who tells the story, always says it made a great impression on her.

“We were living at Scarborough. The town became very crowded during the season, and we drove over the moors to find a little cottage where we could get lodgings away from the town. At last we found an ideal, picturesque little place, covered with jasmine and roses and standing in a dear old-fashioned garden.

“The woman who owned it lived there, and let us the rooms. I had a front bedroom overlooking the garden, with a lattice window and some nice old-fashioned furniture and china.

“One day I was sitting at the window when my mother came in and said, ‘Isn’t this a fascinating room?’

‘Yes,’ I am told I answered, ‘but so sad.’

“My mother was astonished, for it was a particularly sunny, cheerful room; then I added to my mother’s astonishment by saying, ‘Mother, is there any illness you can have that stops you from moving? I feel as if one side of me was dead.’

“Just then, before she could answer, the woman who owned the cottage came in and said, ‘Isn’t it a pretty view? It was such a comfort to my mother. She had paralysis, and used to sit by that window for hours looking out.’

“Very strange—wasn’t it?—that the dead, woman’s sensations should have been felt long afterwards by a child?”